

Thaddeus Coffin House
89 Main Street
Nantucket
Nantucket County
Massachusetts

HABS No. MASS-921

HABS
MASS
10-NANT
41-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

ADDENDUM
FOLLOWS...

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D. C. 20240

THADDEUS COFFIN HOUSE

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MASS
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Location: 89 Main Street (on north side), Nantucket,
Massachusetts

Present Owner: Emily Fordyce Ewing

Present Occupant: Emily Fordyce Ewing

Present Use: Seasonal occupancy

Brief Statement
of Significance: An example of a pre-Revolutionary Nantucket
structure enlarged and altered in keeping with
later needs and styles.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners:

Historians have stated that the house was built between 1746 and 1750. After an extensive search, however, the first mention found in the records is of the sale of the house in 1834 by the heirs of Silvanus Macy to Jared Coffin.

It is on record that this was the homestead of Silvanus Macy on his death in 1833, but how he came to own it is at present not determined. It is assumed that it came to him from Thaddeus Coffin, but in what manner is not known. Nantucket records of that early date are vague.

Apparently the house has always been known as the Thaddeus Coffin House, and it is quite possible that Thaddeus Coffin who died in 1787 built it and that it passed to his son, Captain Thaddeus who was born in 1755 and died in 1820. He in turn had a son Thaddeus Coffin, Jr. who married Eliza Cartwright in 1816 and it is interesting to note that in 1846 the property was again owned by a member of the Cartwright family.

1834 -- Jared Coffin bought property for \$3500. from the heirs of Silvanus Macy.

1845 -- Robert F. Gardner purchased for \$2700.

1846 -- George B. Cartwright, "being premises formerly the homestead of Silvanus Macy." Property passed from George B. Cartwright to Charles W.

Cartwright by inheritance.

1872 -- John H. McLarren bought for \$1500.

1873 -- John M. Bovey bought for \$1900.

1875 -- Vinal W. Brown

1885 -- Sarah M. Richardson

1925 -- Ruth H. Marshall bought property from Sarah A. Mitchell, widow of George F. Mitchell, "being the same premises conveyed by Vinal W. Brown to Sarah M. Richardson Sept. 4, 1885, and by said Sarah M. Richardson devised to James Mitchell by will allowed June 1, 1891, and by said James Mitchell devised to George F. Mitchell by will allowed July 16, 1896, and by said George F. Mitchell devised to me, the said Sarah A. Mitchell, will allowed July, 1923."

1960 -- Albert E., Jr. and Richard S. Marshall (sons of Ruth H. Marshall) by deed.

1965 -- to date -- Emily Fordyce Ewing.

(Abstract, Records in Nantucket Registry of Deeds)

2. Date of erection: Probably between 1734 and 1750. Many of the solid features of the mid-eighteenth century construction are present in this house and although not proven, it appears very probable that the original part of the house was built between 1734 and 1750. It was enlarged in 1875.
3. Architect: None. Built by Island carpenters.
4. Original plans, construction, etc.: This was originally a small house with its entrance at the west side. It had two rooms and a kitchen and three bedrooms upstairs plus an unfinished attic. The original house was completely cellared and there was a fireplace in the cellar, still visible although filled in with stone.

The house was probably built with the customary sloping roof to the north. Old corner posts and girts are visible in the older part, as well as wide floor boards, summers, etc.

5. Notes on alterations and additions: In 1875 Island carpenters gave the house two stories front and rear by adding two rooms and another kitchen to the ground floor and two bedrooms and a sort of cubbyhole to the second floor. The additions were cellarless and no attempt was made to unify old and new roofs.

For the next forty years the house was a two-family affair, with one entrance from Main Street, two kitchens, two water pumps and two back kitchens or laundries. The panelled study overlooking the garden was originally a kitchen.

(Abstract, Correspondence of Mr. Marshall, in possession Nantucket Historical Association)

When the Marshalls owned the house a great deal of remodelling was done, reversing the stairs, combining rooms and adding a chimney. An interesting feature was uncovered by them. This was the discovery of two of the old-time painted floors, one of the type known as spatter-work and the other of an equally rare type in its original pattern, painted with a feather brush.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: This was the homestead of Silvanus Macy until he died in 1833. Silvanus was the great, great grandson of Thomas Macy, first settler of the Island of Nantucket.

He followed the sea for most of his early life (as his father, Captain John, had before him), in the coating trade and later codfishing and whaling. As merchants and traders, he and his brother, Obed, early Island historian and author of the first history of Nantucket, conducted an unusually close partnership, their names appearing jointly in many transactions, especially in land, but also in the manufacture of sperm-oil candles, making boots and shoes and fitting out sailing vessels. As written in the Macy Genealogy: "The partnership continued for forty-seven years, until the death of Silvanus. During the whole business connection the most perfect harmony prevailed between them; and so strong was their love for each other that their whole property, including even their furniture, was held in common, and no account was kept of family expenses, each purchasing and paying from a common fund for whatever was desired.

Silvanus Macy's grandson, Rowland Hussey Macy, was the founder of the New York store which has borne his name ever since: "R. H. Macy's". As a youth, Rowland Macy went to sea on the whale-ship Emily Morgan and it is claimed that it was on the Island of Pernambuco, the first foreign soil on which Macy ever stepped, that as was the custom, he became tattooed with a red star on the back of one of his hands -- the Macy store in New York some twenty years later used a red star as a trademark.

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photographs of before and after restoration in 1926 in possession of Marshall family; photograph in A Mirror of Nantucket by George Allen Fowlkes, New Jersey: Press of Interstate, 1959; photograph in Ninety-Five Percent Perfect by Everett U. Crosby, Nantucket: Tetaukimmo Press, 1953.

Prepared by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin
Nantucket, Massachusetts
February, 1966

PART II. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared for the Historic American Buildings Survey project on Nantucket, Massachusetts. They are part of a continuing HABS comprehensive survey of the early architecture and urban design of Nantucket financed by a grant from the Nantucket Historical Trust.

The project was under the general supervision of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Historical information was provided by Mrs. Marie M. Coffin of Nantucket, Massachusetts. Photographs are by Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The material was edited for deposit in the Library of Congress by Mrs. Constance Werner Ramirez, August 1971.

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